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Senator expects EPA to help, not hinder:

DORGAN BLOCKS CONFIRMATION OF EPA NOMINEES UNTIL "ACHIEVE" PESTICIDE ISSUE SETTLED

(WASHINGTON, DC) -- U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan moved Thursday to block confirmation of two high-ranking Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials whose names have been sent to Congress by President Clinton.

Dorgan's action is the latest in a dispute that family farmers, the Congressional delegation, the state Attorney General Heidi Heitkamp and state Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson have with the EPA. The dispute is over the licensing of a herbicide called Achieve which is used to control weeds in wheat and barley crops.

The EPA has sided with a company called Zeneca Ag Products which manufactures Achieve and which charges about \$6 an acre more to U.S. producers, than it charges for essentially the same product it markets in Canada. State Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson took action recently to allow North Dakota farmers to use a lower priced version of Achieve purchased in Canada. Following that, the Zeneca Ag Products Corporation filed a complaint with the EPA. In a subsequent conference call between Johnson, Heitkamp and the EPA, the agency verbally made a commitment to permit the North Dakota action until it has fully studied the case. However, following that call, the EPA prohibited the import of Achieve.

Dorgan said that he is blocking the Senate confirmations of two EPA officials, until and unless the EPA starts using a little common sense. The two nominations awaiting confirmation are for the offices of Deputy Administrator and Assistant Administrator for the EPA. Dorgan's action to block the nomination means that these two officials cannot be confirmed by the Senate at this point.

Dorgan's said that the current situation is unfair to U.S. farmers. Canadians use the chemical and send the grain treated with the chemical to the U.S., and the EPA admits that there are no health issues with the use of this chemical. But denying U.S. farmers the ability to bring the chemical in from Canada to apply to U.S. crops means that in effect the EPA is being used as an accessory to price fixing by Zeneca.

"The EPA has been unwilling to support the legislation I've introduced in the Senate that would harmonize the licensing of these chemicals between the U.S. and Canada," Dorgan said. "Now they've broken their word and taken action to stop Roger Johnson who is unmasking a scheme by Zeneca Corporation to keep prices artificially higher in the U.S. for the same chemical."

"Until the EPA decides it's going to use a little common sense in this area, I'm going to use the only leverage I have and block the confirmation process for the two nominees that are currently before the Senate," he said. "I take no joy in doing so, but U.S. farmers are getting taken for a ride by the Zeneca Corporation. The EPA ought to work with us to find a way to resolve these issues rather than continuing to put up road blocks."

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